



Men's Health

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5 Ways to Take Charge of Your Health

Good health doesn't happen all by itself. You have to take charge and make it happen. Here are five things you can do right now.

When it comes to the state of health in America, the statistics speak for themselves. Obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are all on the rise. So are depression and high blood pressure.

While there are certainly lots of explanations for this trend, the best thing you can do is to buck it. By staying healthy, you reduce your risk of stroke, heart attack, and other major complications.

But this requires more than just going on a diet for a while. In fact, it means you have to be proactive and take charge of your own health. It means you have to be responsible on an ongoing basis. Here are five ways you can get started.

1 Get a checkup.

When was the last time you saw your doctor? For many, it's been a while. But regular checkups are an important part of staying healthy. How often you should go depends on your age and overall state of health. But if you haven't been in some time, it would be a good idea to check with your doctor and see if you are due.

And while you're at it, find out which screenings you need. Your age and gender may put you at higher risk for certain conditions. Getting screened can help your doctor spot potential problems early on. It could even turn out to be a lifesaver.



Video Spotlight:

[Tips for Exercising and Getting Back into Shape](#)

[Hereditary Risk Factors for Heart Disease](#)

5 Ways to Take Charge of Your Health *(continued)*

2 Get moving.

There's a stockpile of evidence that exercise is good for you. Not only can it help with weight control, but it's also effective against:

- Stress
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Depression and anxiety

If you haven't been active in a while, start out slowly. Work your way up to at least 2 1/2 hours of moderate aerobic activity each week. And add in strength training at least twice a week. Just be sure to clear your new routine with your doctor first.

3 Get hydrated.

Lots of us are guilty of not getting enough water. There is no set amount that's recommended. It depends on many factors including your age, gender, weight, health, and activity level. The weather, what you eat, and what medicines you take also affect how much water you need. But it's important to drink enough to stay hydrated. Getting your fluids helps:

- Prevent dehydration
- Regulate body temperature
- Aid in removing wastes from the body
- Cushion joints
- Protect sensitive tissues

While you can certainly get your fluids from various beverages, it's best to avoid drinks that are high in sugar. These often lead to unnecessary weight gain.

4 Get calm.

There's no denying that stress is bad for you. Its toxic effects can lead to serious health problems. Thankfully, there are plenty of ways to combat it. Some of the more commonly practiced techniques include:

- Breathing exercises
- Muscle relaxation



- Meditation
- Massage therapy
- Stretching exercises, such as yoga or tai chi

If you aren't sure how to get started, go online or find a professional instructor in your community.

5 Get to bed earlier.

Those late night comedy shows are lots of fun, but they also cut into your sleep. Most adults need between 7 and 9 hours a night, which studies show many adults aren't getting.

If you've been burning the candle at both ends, it's time to slow down and give your body the break it needs. Put yourself on a regular sleep schedule and limit your caffeine intake at night. As your sleep habits improve, so may your general outlook and overall state of health.

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Setting Aside Prostate Cancer Myths

Although more men are being cured of prostate cancer and more cases are being found in younger men, myths about the disease continue. Learn the truth.

Myth #1: Men die with prostate cancer and not because of it.

Reality: While one man in six will get prostate cancer during his lifetime, only one in 35 will die from it. Most end up dying of other causes. Although men with less aggressive forms of prostate cancer may live with the disease for years, it is still the second-leading cause of cancer death in men.

Many of the 200,000-plus cases of prostate cancer diagnosed in the U.S. this year will be aggressive and will cause serious illness.

Myth #2: Screening isn't worth the trouble because doctors can't agree on how useful it is.

Reality: The goal of prostate cancer screening is to find the disease early, when it can be treated more effectively. There are two types of prostate screening tests: the PSA blood test and the digital rectal exam (DRE). Doctors agree that both should be used together to get the most information. Medical experts disagree, though, on whether all men should

be screened for prostate cancer. This is because the screening tests are not precise.

For example, tests results can come back positive in a person who may have an enlarged prostate due to a benign (noncancerous) condition called prostatic hypertrophy. Evidence has even shown that screening can be harmful, leading to unneeded surgery and associated side effects, like erectile dysfunction. But screening can also save lives, especially if an aggressive form of prostate cancer is found. Experts do agree that every man should make his own decision about prostate screening together with his doctor.

The American Cancer Society recommends that doctors discuss prostate cancer screening options with you starting at age 50. If you have a close relative (father, brother or son) with prostate cancer, or if you are African American, this talk should start at age 45. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) states that there needs to be more evidence to help doctors and patients know when and what type of screening is best. They do not advise screening in men who are age 75 or older. The bottom line is that you and your doctor should decide whether or not screening is right for you.

Setting Aside Prostate Cancer Myths (*continued*)

Myth #3: All men have erectile dysfunction after prostatectomy.

Reality: Prostatectomy is the removal of a cancerous prostate gland. The procedure can damage nerves that control erections. During the first few months after surgery, most men have some degree of erectile dysfunction (ED). Whether ED lasts longer depends on your age, extent of the cancer, your erectile function before surgery and the type of surgery you have.

A nerve-sparing prostatectomy is an option that may reduce the chances of ED. Medications or penile injections or devices can help restore erectile function for many men if needed.

Myth #4: All men have incontinence after prostate cancer surgery.

Reality: Urinary incontinence (not being able to control urination) is one of the major side effects of prostate cancer surgery. For most men, it goes away weeks to months after surgery. One large study reports that five years after prostate surgery, about one third of men still have some stress incontinence. This means that urine can leak out when you cough, exercise, laugh or sneeze. Leaking was considered severe in only about 5 percent of these cases.

Large cancer treatment centers and doctors who perform a lot of prostate cancer surgery report lower rates of incontinence.

SOURCES:

- American Cancer Society. How many men get prostate cancer? Accessed: 07/21/2010
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5 Ways to Keep Your Brain Healthy

Alzheimer's is a devastating disease. Research is ongoing to see if healthy lifestyle practices can help prevent it.

Alzheimer's is a devastating brain disease. It's a major cause of dementia, or loss of cognitive abilities. Those who have it gradually lose their memories and struggle to communicate. Their personalities and behavior change. In time, they become dependent on caregivers.

The exact cause of Alzheimer's isn't known. But researchers continue to search for answers in the hopes of finding better treatments and ways to prevent the disease.

You can't control two of the strongest risk factors for the disease: age and heredity. But experts are finding that, in fact, lifestyle may play a very important role when it comes to who gets Alzheimer's and who doesn't.



5 Ways to Keep Your Brain Healthy (continued)

Five strategies for brain health

You can take steps to keep your brain healthy. Some of these steps may also have other health benefits, such as helping you to control your weight, lower your risk of heart disease, and live a healthy, active life as you age. Research is ongoing to see if these healthy habits can also prevent or slow Alzheimer's disease.

1 Stay socially engaged.

Interacting with other people stimulates the brain. Spend time with family and friends. It's also good to reach out to new people. Join a community group or volunteer at a library or senior center. Combining physical activity with socializing may have even more benefits. Join a walking group or square dance club.

2 Keep your mind sharp.

Just like with muscle strength, when it comes to brain power it's "use it or lose it." Challenge yourself by doing puzzles, learning new card games, or taking up a new sport. Don't do the same things the same way with the same people. Seek out new experiences.

Take a class in something you've always been curious about, whether it's pottery, philosophy, or welding. Join a book club or quilting group. When you walk or drive, take different routes.



3 Eat a heart-healthy diet.

Studies suggest that a diet that's good for your heart is also good for your brain. A heart-healthy diet is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and salt, and includes plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Choose colorful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants, such as blueberries, strawberries, broccoli, spinach, and red peppers. Add foods high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids, such as tuna and salmon.

4 Get regular exercise.

Physical activity helps increase blood flow to the brain and can improve mood. It also lowers the risk of diseases that can lead to dementia, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Pick an activity you enjoy and can stick with. Even better, find a partner to do it with you. Walking, swimming, biking and yoga are some good choices. Remember, always check with your doctor before you increase your physical activity.

5 Protect your brain.

Take measures to prevent head injuries, which can jar and damage the brain. This means wearing helmets for bike riding, skiing, and motorcycle riding. Also, wear seatbelts when driving.

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- National Institute on Aging. Can Alzheimer's disease be prevented? Accessed: 03/30/2011

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